



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
LIMITED

CEDAW/C/1996/L.1/Add.7

31 January 1996

ENGLISH

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/SPANISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Fifteenth session
15 January-2 February 1996

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

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Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

4. Second and third periodic reports

Cuba

1. The Committee considered the combined second and third periodic report of Cuba (CEDAW/C/CUB/2-3 and Add.1) at its 294th and 295th meetings on 22 January 1996 (see CEDAW/C/SR.294 and 295).

2. In introducing the combined report, the representative of Cuba recalled that her country had been the first to sign and the second to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. That constituted an historic achievement for the country and showed the importance it attached to the Convention. Policies for women, however, had begun already in 1959, following the Revolution, and they still constituted a priority.

3. Despite the economic and political circumstances in which the country had found itself since 1989 as a result of the stepped-up economic embargo by the

United States of America, which had had severe repercussions on the situation of women and children and had led to the deterioration of the quality of people's lives, Cuba had not ceased to go forward towards achieving full equality between the sexes.

4. The representative said she was sorry that the report did not comply with the Committee's general guidelines and replied to the Committee's written questions on implementation of the articles of the Convention.

5. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was a major goal of the Cuban Government, and its legal and practical implementation was under constant review by the Government as well as by the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). Relevant ministries and institutions had developed and promoted programmes to change socio-cultural patterns of conduct between women and men and to educate women on their rights. For children between 6 and 14 years of age, the schooling rate was currently 99 per cent. Girls participated at every level, and constituted 58 per cent of the student population in higher education. In the most recent parliamentary elections, 98.7 per cent of the population had participated. There were, however, still more men than women in positions of political leadership.

6. Women currently made up 40.6 per cent of the labour force in Cuba, which represented a slight increase since 1989, and despite the dramatic drop in production and the subsequent changes in order to re-structure employment, women had not been the most affected group. Efforts were being made, nevertheless, to provide more training for women and opportunities for redeployment, including special measures for female-headed households. The Government was studying the question of wage differentials.

7. While the improvement of women's health had been a major achievement, the embargo currently affected the daily diet of women and children. Furthermore, there remained a need to place emphasis on prevention and risk reduction. Women had a life expectancy of 77.6 years, and there had been a steady reduction in infant mortality. The rate of maternal mortality due to abortion had decreased to 6.4 per thousand but still represented the major cause of maternal mortality.

8. Women had the right to retain their nationality and that of their children after marriage. The violation of the right to equality was a criminal offence in Cuba, and the law offered protection in cases of violence against women. Efforts were being made to step up education for prostitutes and their families, as there had been a re-emergency of prostitution in recent years. Women enjoyed the same rights as men with respect to credit and bank loans and could have title to land on an equal basis with men.

9. Regarding the follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the representative said that a large-scale process of information and discussion of the commitments contained in the Beijing document had begun, in which women and the whole society were taking part.

Final observations of the Committee

Introduction

10. The Committee thanked the representative of the Government of Cuba for her detailed responses to the written questions which had been provided prior to the session of the Committee. Although the Committee noted that the second and third combined report of Cuba had not completely followed the guidelines established by the Committee, sufficient information on the implementation of the Convention had been presented to show the progress that the country continued to make in the area of women's rights. It welcomed the high-level representation in the delegation from the national machinery from women.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

11. The situation of women in Cuba was of particular interest to the Committee, since its socialist political and socio-economic system had provided its women with different experiences from those of most other Latin American countries, while at the same time, it was subject to an economic embargo. That situation, combined with the disappearance of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its socialist allies, with which Cuba had maintained close economic, commercial and collaborative ties, had had serious repercussions for the Cuban economy. As a result, some of the programmes to promote equal opportunities and to eliminate stereotypes between women and men had been curtailed or suspended, and the food situation in general had deteriorated.

Positive aspects

12. The Committee noted that Cuban legislation regarding equality between men and women was among the most advanced in Latin America and that discrimination was punishable under the law.

13. The Committee also noted the increase in the number of women at all levels and branches of education, in the labour force in a wide variety of occupations, in scientific fields, in sports and in policy-making at local and national levels, and in the diplomatic corps.

14. The steady decline in maternal mortality, largely owing to improved care for pregnant women and better care for children in their early years, was noted by the Committee. It was also noted that deciding the number and spacing of one's children had been proclaimed a fundamental human right.

15. Despite stereotypes of women's role, drop-out rates for girls had been declining, and adult education programmes had been developed.

16. The Committee appreciated the fact that, despite the dramatic drop in economic growth between 1989 and 1994, the Government had tried to distribute its effects throughout the population as a whole so that they would not be felt solely by women. On the whole, women's rights and the enjoyment of those rights had been maintained.

Principal areas of concern

17. The Committee noted the fact that the Government intended to uphold its reservation concerning article 29. It was concerned about the elimination of certain areas of progress for women owing to the embargo and the subsequent economic constraints.

18. The Committee observed that gender stereotypes persisted despite the high levels of school enrolment. Domestic work and child care continued to be the responsibility of women [while men played an active role in public and political life and occupied most senior positions.] [despite the efforts of the Government and the Federation of Cuban Women to change the mentality of society.]

19. The Committee pointed out the need to expand the participation of women at the highest levels of political power to the same proportion as their participation at the grass-roots level.

20. The Committee noted that, owing to the undervaluing of women's work, there was indirect discrimination in women's wages. The Committee expressed interest in the situation of women in trade unions.

21. The Committee noted with some surprise that domestic violence was reported to be infrequent and that it was not considered to be a social problem.

22. The Committee also noted that the economic situation in Cuba resulting from the economic embargo had produced a serious shortage of essential products like medicines and contraceptive devices. That had been problematic for women and for the population as a whole.

23. The Committee was concerned about the re-emergence of prostitution in Cuba, which was linked to the growth in tourism and to the problems facing the economy.

Suggestions and recommendations

24. The Committee recommended that disaggregated data should be collected concerning the number of complaints regarding discrimination.

25. Surveys and studies should be undertaken to determine the extent of violence against women, in particular domestic violence, even if the victims did not file a complaint. [Violence against women should be officially punished. The Committee noted its general recommendation 19 on that question.] [Surveys and studies should be carried out to determine the impact of violence against women, especially domestic violence, in order to find out whether it was going unreported. The authorities should acknowledge the existence of various forms of violence and take steps to punish it, in accordance with general recommendation 19 of the Committee.]

26. Successful programmes to combat sexist prejudices and stereotyping, such as "Mujeres", "Muchachas" and "Perfil F", should be revived as soon as possible, since they helped to address the attitudes of both men and women that needed to

be changed, particularly with regard to the need to share in the care and education of children. That would be in keeping with article 5 of the Convention and general recommendation 21.

27. The Government should do everything possible, under the circumstances, to meet the demand for contraceptives. Special information programmes relating to sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, should be developed for young girls, particularly those engaged in prostitution, in keeping with article 12 of the Convention and general recommendation 15.

28. Every effort should be made to eliminate the root causes of prostitution, to offer more and better job opportunities to young girls and women, and not to place the sole responsibility for prostitution on the women themselves. Efforts must be undertaken to prosecute procurers and clients who violated those women's rights.

29. A careful study was needed of whether women were paid the same salaries or wages as men for work of equal value, and to document occupational discrimination and its relationship to income.

30. [The Committee expressed its appreciation for the successful work of the Cuban Women's Federation, which represented 90 per cent of the women of Cuba.]

31. The Committee asked that more information should be given in the subsequent report on redeployment of women in the labour market and their income situation. The Committee, noting the active participation of the Federation of Cuban Women in policy-making and in many other fields to advance the status of women, suggested that efforts should be continued to ensure that women had an effective voice in decisions which affected their lives and that an enabling environment was created for women's effective enjoyment of their rights, as set out in the Convention and confirmed at the Fourth World Conference on Women.
